1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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for the evening meal, Rosary, and sleep. Electricity has made his time-table only slightly less dependent on the times of the rising and setting sun.

Increased spending-power, a more varied diet now including a variety of preserved and non-local foods, and the replacement of home-produced cotton by purchased materials for making clothes, have all contributed to the extension of shopping facilities in the villages. Apart from the 'general store', specialised shops have also made their appearance - butchers, pharmacists, clothing shops, and so on. The 1939-45 war brought flour and bread rationing and the end of home-baking - hence a further village specialisation (see p. 182). Since the War, the number of vans touring the countryside every week has increased rapidly to bring a variety of wares to the door of even the most lonely farmhouse. The *petrolju* van was early in the field, for the rural Maltese have long relied on paraffin for both cooking and such heating as the houses receive. Yet another addition in recent years to the diet of the poorer classes has been the free distributions of food (cheese, rice, corn-meal and flour) made by C.A.R.E. and by Catholic Relief Services (cheese, beans, flour, etc.), another organisation distributing surplus United States food supplies abroad.

Village housing is changing more slowly. The traditional Maltese rural home was a flat-roofed dwelling built round an enclosed courtyard, from which a staircase frequently led to an upper floor. The courtyard was the centre of domestic life and much of the regular work of the household was done here. A door, large enough to take a cart, opened on to the street. Windows on outside walls were small and rare. In many of the older parts of the villages, accommodation for animals and stores adjoins the rooms occupied by the family, the whole forming a compact economic and domestic unit. Water was carried from a village pump and sanitation, if any, was limited to independent cess-pits requiring periodic emptying. In winter such premises were liable to be very cold; in the heat of summer the rough roads of beaten earth readily produced a fine dust which can only have had harmful effects on the widespread trachoma and similar ailments.

Nowadays much of this survives only in the memory of the older people. Only some village streets in Gozo are not now surfaced; mains sewerage has been extended to all the larger villages of Malta; electricity is absent only in north-western Gozo; familiar red telephone kiosks have appeared all over the Islands; the larger villages in Malt.. have cinemas, in addition to much older Band Club buildings.

The essential features of the village society within which the Maltese farmer lives today may be summarised thus in conclusion:-

Economically, there has been a change from the independent, subsistent family unit to a diversified and inter-dependent occupational structure in the village, along with a realisation of the impossibility of maintaining Maltese agriculture in its traditional form without 'artificial' support. Materially, the village is seen to have benefited from a wide range of developments which have improved it as a place in which to live for the Maltese countryman with his now greater range of demands - and the buying-power with which to achieve them, thanks to war-time siege and subsequently to Government subsidy and guarantee. Socially, literacy and the awareness of a different way of life beyond the village have brought to the younger generation an intense dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction not only with the social regime of the village, even in its present broadened and functionally diversified form, but also with the farming on which the community has depended.

Thus farming in its present form is waning and the Maltese farmer as he was in the recent past - and still is among the older generation - is a disappearing individual. If the clash between the present younger generation and the old order can be resolved and if the retreat from the land can be stemmed at all, a different kind of agriculture will emerge with a new type of farmer and a changed rural society.

REFERENCES

1. Census of the Maltese Islands 1948. Table 53.
2. C.A.R.E. - Co-operative for American Remittances to Everywhere.

Note: For a fuller consideration see B. W. Beeley: 'The Individual and Changing Rural Society in Malta', Ph.D. Thesis, Durham, 1960.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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CHAPTER V

The Church and Village Politics

Most Maltese regulate their lives by the daily and monthly cycle of religious activities. The major divisions of the day are rung from the bells of the village church. They first ring the Paternoster half an hour before the first Mass. Then the Angelus bell rings a call to prayer at eight in the morning, at noon and at sunset. The final bell of the day is rung two or three hours after sunset, and is a brief request for the living to remember the dead in their prayers. The call of the Angelus is observed by many. When it is rung, work and conversation stop whether in a government office or a village café, men remove their hats, and someone among them leads them in a short prayer. In Gozo I have seen a busy square become suddenly silent and many people kneel in the street as the Ave Maria was rung at sunset. People also often kneel in the streets when the bells announce the elevation of the Host during a sung Mass, and during Benediction in the evening. And finally, late in the evening, clusters of relatives and neighbours can be seen sitting in their open doorways reciting the Rosary together before they go to bed.

Most girls and women and many boys and men attend one of the three or four daily Masses which are offered in all parish churches between four and seven in the morning. Virtually every one in the village attends one of the five or six Masses offered on Sundays. The few who do not attend are known to the village, and are the subject of gossip and other social pressure. Since the recent dispute between the MLP and the Church, however, their numbers are increasing.

As the church bells mark the important hours of the day, so the principal divisions of the year are set out by the annual national and parochial religious feasts and processions. Besides being major religious occasions, they are eagerly looked forward to as recreational events. Though secular spectacles, such as political rallies, the government-run Carnival procession and, above all, the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

cinema, are becoming increasingly important, the principal amusements of the Maltese still generally have some connection with their religious ceremonies. The French Consul in Malta at the beginning of the last century described this enjoyment of religion with great eloquence:

> Le Maltais a de la religion au fond de l'âme; cette religion, dont il remplit les devoirs sans ostentation, il l'aime autant plus qu'elle prend sa source, non seulement dans une foi sincère, mais encore dans cette habitude, contractée dès l'enfance, de chercher au sein des cérémonies religieuses un délassement, que les autres peuples trouvent dans les spectacles et les réjouissances publiques.[1]

People from all parishes come to take part in the diocesan celebrations of St. Joseph the Worker, Corpus Christi and Christ the King. These rallies and processions are usually held in Valletta and Floriana. The national festival of St. Paul's Shipwreck in February, which is also the titular feast of a Valletta parish, draws many people into the city. Another national feast commemorates the lifting of the great Turkish siege in 1565. This feast coincides with that of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on September 8, and is celebrated with boat races and other aquatic competitions in the Grand Harbour. But the traditional national festivals for the country people are the feasts of St. Gregory in April and SS. Peter and Paul (*L-Imnarja*) in June. Though most of the pageantry of the former has been abolished, the custom of going for a picnic to Marsaxlokk, the little village just beyond the terminal point of the procession in Żejtun, lingers on. On the occasion of the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, thousands proceed to the Buskett, Malta's only wood, where they spend most of the night before the feast eating, drinking and singing. On the feast day they throng to see the agricultural show in the Buskett, the religious procession in Mdina and the bareback horse races that take place just outside Rabat. While these two feasts are the occasions for special outings for the villagers, they are generally looked upon as very low affairs by many from the professional and middle classes.

The principal religious spectacles, however, are those which are organized at the village level. During the course of a year in Kortin, for example, there are fourteen major celebrations and

[1] M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (3 vols., Paris, Paulin, 1840), III, 168.

[Village of Mgarr]

By the mid-thirties Mgarr had become independent of Mosta as a Police area and had been connected to the Telephone network[15]. Other amenities to reach the village about this time included a number of levelled roads, although asphalting did not appear until after the 1939-45 War. During the War years most construction activity was halted. Some 700 refugees from the blitzed harbour areas were billeted in the village; thirty shelters were dug, and about 600 bombs fell in the vicinity of the village destroying two houses and killing three people (B/291). United States' forces camped near Mgarr prior to the Sicily invasion: an Italian aircraft crashed not far away. Mgarr heard about the war and experienced as much of it at first hand as most other rural parts of the Islands lying well away from the Dockyard, air bases and other strategic targets. Food rationing and Government control of production put the farmers of Mgarr in as strong a position as elsewhere but at the worst period of the siege even they were reduced to chewing carob beans[12].

By the advent of the present decade Mgarr had acquired the normal characteristics of community life of village Malta, with Church, school, police station, dispensary and doctor, telephones, and roads. The built-up area has since expanded rapidly. In this present decade, too, the village has gone on to 'catch-up' with older settlements to the extent of establishing the four branches of the Catholic Action movement (Appendix 4). A most modern and well-appointed 'oratory' has for five years been the focal point of Catholic teaching and social work in the Parish. Its theatre holds 700 and shows films on Sundays and special occasions. More recently a commercial cinema has opened in the village but, one understands, it cannot detract from the popularity of the oratory film show.

Within the past few years, shops have appeared in the village which is now independent in this respect for food and general items. Travelling vans, a prominent feature of the countryside, further swell the range of goods available on the spot and are joined in this door to door service by the weekly paraffin (petrolju) vehicle. For other items Mgarr housewives still make the journey to Mosta or Valletta on the buses which operate every few hours; a generation ago their mothers carried bread on their backs each week from Mosta, the parent village.

On account of its recent development, Mgarr lacks certain features found in the larger and much older settlements. The Catholic Action is the only Lay Movement in the village - though it is notably active there, and of the Confraternities which are numerous in the older settlements Mgarr has only three (Appendix 4).